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Baruch's Biography (continued)

The Building Project

The numerical growth of the church led us to give thought to the future. We did not want to be directed by events but, to the extent God would allow us, to direct them. This involved strategic thinking, then to be translated into practical steps. We agreed that we did not want a church that was too large for us to effectively shepherd. Our practice was to maintain personal contact with each individual, among other means through a regular visitation program and by devoting a good part of our weekly Elders meetings to thought, discussion and prayer concerning families and individuals visited.

On the other hand, our desire was to reach a stage in which the church could be self-supporting, fully bearing the financial burden of its own life and witness as well as reaching out to others. Hopefully, the Lord would grant us the privilege of sending out at least one overseas missionary family, fully supported by us, and establish churches in other Israeli locations.

With these considerations in mind, we came to the conclusion that we should accept a church no larger than, say, 450 adult members, consisting of around 200 bread winners. We realized that reaching our goals would be a matter of a generation. Most of the immigrants who made up the majority of the congregation were on the lower rung of the economic ladder. They needed to establish themselves economically, buy homes, and educate their children. The next generation, we expected, would be financially viable and could bring the church forward to financial self-sufficiency. Until we reached that goal, we would have to rely on the generosity of others. Christian Witness to Israel (CWI), Patmos, Reformed Baptist Mission Services (whose role was later taken over by the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in America) and various friends and supporting churches played a large role in providing such support while, almost every year, the church increased its contribution to the CWI budget toward my salary.

The premises we were using were the CWI offices, premeditatedly purchased to meet the needs of the church when it numbered some 30-40 congregants. But we were growing and the premises were no longer suitable. So we commenced a church

building fund, to which a significant part of our own church budget contributed annually and to which others generously contributed as well.

We envisaged a building that could meet the needs of a 450-member congregation. We began looking for a suitable property. We looked into industrial complexes in which zoning permitted activities akin to church life (there is no zoning for churches in Israel, except in Jerusalem and Nazareth). Our first thought was to purchase a building or part of one in a light industrial area within a 25 mile range of the majority of the congregants. Persistent efforts came to naught. We then began looking at land in light industrial areas, with a view to constructing our own building. Every time we found something suitable, we learned that the cost of land had increased and what we had on hand was not enough.

Finally, Bob van Kampen, a wealthy Christian friend of one of the congregants, stepped in and generously granted us \$350,000 to buttress our savings and enable us to purchase just under 3/4 of an acre south of Gedera, in the epicenter of cities and towns from which our congregants hailed.

We set about planning the building. This was to be the first time a Christian congregation among the Jews in Israel built its own church facility. On the one hand we expected stern opposition and agreed that we would labor to set a precedent that would pave the way for other churches. On the other, we decided we would want a building that would perhaps set a trend of Israel church buildings, a silent, visible witness that would speak volumes: obviously part of the local traditional architecture yet modern, highly functional and as cheap to maintain as possible.

We also wanted the building to express our understanding of church life: a community centered on God in Christ as he is known through his word. So the main auditorium was to feature the congregation in a half-circle, with members facing one another and all facing the pulpit in the center. Acoustics were designed so that a sound system would not be needed. Ample classrooms in the half-basement would be fitted with showers as well as the usual facilities, so as to be useful for summer activities. A small swimming pool outside, combined with shaded grassy areas, barbecue stations and benches would render the facility useful for family gatherings.

Our facility would serve the community, both that of Grace and Truth and of the wider body of Christ. When services and other church activities would not be held, the facility would be rented out to various secular bodies, thus enabling the church to subsidize the costs of maintaining the facility by income thus gained.

Our building fund was depleted by the purchase of land. Here our Dutch brethren were the first to step in. They invested strenuous efforts to find resources for construction, set up a sub-committee and finally a wholly new organization (The Isaac da Costa Fund) to bring in the resources needed. At one stage the group of ministers and businessmen who ran the committee undertook personal liability for a 200,000 Euro loan, provided by various bodies in the Netherlands! (A good part of the loan was forgiven, the rest paid back by contributions.)

In the US, Jim Jackson sought to set up a not-for-profit organization that would enable American contributors to make tax-exempt contributions. His labors were stymied by an unsympathetic bureaucracy. Jerry Lund and Ben Terreblanche in Cleveland, Dan and Rachel Brooks in Phoenix, Carmen Speirs in Colorado Springs all lent a hand. On one occasion I was informed of an intended contributor who indicated that he would give us \$1,000,000 if I came to the US and met with him. I

flew over, rented a car in Chicago and was on my way to Cleveland when I was told to turn back. The man had changed his mind. (He was later persuaded by our contact to compensate with a contribution, which he kindly did and sent us \$100,000).

Patmos International also undertook to support the effort and, for a number of years, provided significant periodic contributions and provided for the salary of one of our own, engaged in the building project. Murdo MacLeod passed away and Nancie, his widow, requested that contributions be made to our building fund in lieu of flowers. Jeannie, a north England sister in Christ, embroidered bookmarks, which she sold and then sent us whatever she made by this means.

We engaged an architect, designed the building and submitted our request for a building permit. As intimated, we expected opposition and were flabbergasted when our application was approved upon its first submission. Having sought out a Project Manager, he engaged the various engineers (sewage, hygiene, heating ventilation and air conditioning and so on), found a constructor and we began to build. It was an exciting moment.

Meanwhile prices continued to rise in Israel in a disconcerting way. The economy was in danger of collapse. At one stage we underwent a 950% annual inflation, causing the collapse of many companies and the closure of many businesses. Both CWI and the church took to paying salaries every week so as to enable staff to make the most of their income before prices rose further.

Our constructor deceived us, forcing us at great loss to remove him from the project and engage another. The company we engaged to wire the building placed a few meters of wire at each end of the piping, demanded its pay and collapsed. Happily, we never paid a good part of its dues, but we sustained another loss through this event.

Yad LeAchim, an Orthodox, semi-governmental organization dedicated to "combat the mission," challenged the legality of our building permit. Yad LeAchim had long had us in their sights. They waited until a stay order would inflict the most financial damage, and then applied to the Court. We were ordered to desist building until the case was decided.

Our opponents had engaged one of Israel's most unpopular yet prominent lawyers, one who successfully had defended a notorious Nazi criminal before an Israeli Court. Our own lawyer advised us to likewise seek out a prominent lawyer to defend our case, which we did. Eliad Shraga founded a major law firm and led the Movement for the Quality of Government in Israel. Sharp, energetic, fearless, with a quick wit and tongue, his office led our legal battle for over a year. Meanwhile, we had to set guards on the building and to try and maintain the quality of what we had constructed while we awaited the resolution of the issue.

The Regional Court was the first judicial instance that reviewed the case made against us. Its ruling was decidedly in our favor, so much so that the judge's decision actually broadened the terms of our permit. Yad LeAchim was obviously unhappy with the ruling and therefore appealed to the Supreme Court, the highest judicial authority in the land. When the Supreme Court finally delivered its ruling, the process came to an end: the Regional Court's decision was fully supported and Yad LeAchim was rebuked by the Court for its efforts against freedom of religion as secured by Israel's Declaration of Independence and through legislation.

Over a year had passed. The quality of some of our construction had deteriorated and new requirements had been devised that the renewal of our building permit required. A good deal of money had been lost, but a precedent was now firmly established, and by the Supreme Court at that! We went back to work -- so far as resources would allow.

THAT then became our major problem. Friends and supporters had tired of the lengthy process and certainly could not make sense of the difficulties we faced. One by one, major supporters withdrew until none but the Dutch brethren stood with us consistently. When I retired from the pastorate in 2008, the building still had not been completed. At the time of writing this paragraph, December 2014, some 15 years later, the local authority is still making new demands on the church and, although the congregation has been allowed to use the building within certain restrictions, a final Occupancy Permit has not been issued.

Political Developments in Israel

Prime Minister Netanyahu has called new elections, scheduled for March 17, 2015. Parties are jockeying into blocs in an effort to win the most votes and therefore be mandated by the President to form the next Government. There are two major issues in these elections: the extremely high cost of living in Israel and the future of negotiations with the Palestinians.

On the right of the political map is incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose charm is waning speedily but, at the time of writing is deemed to still be in a position to carry the election. To his right is rising political star Naphtali Bennet and a smattering of more extreme right wing parties.

In the crowded center are former Finance Minister Yair Lapid, former Telecommunications Minister Moshe Kahlon and present Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. The latter's party has recently taken a blow due to grievous corruption charges made by the police against senior members of the party. The former was considered Israel's Great White Hope in the previous elections. But the Government he joined did not last its day and the short period it did was not enough for Lapid to fulfill his election promises. The short-winded Israel voter has been prematurely disenchanted. Kahlon is now thought to be the next Great White Hope. Time will tell which of these carries the day for the Center.

On the left are former Minister of Interior Isaac ("Bugie") Herzog and former Foreign Affairs and Justice Minister Tsipi Livni. Herzog has yet to prove the kind of mettle it takes not only to win an election but to run an unwieldy Government while coping with the tremendous challenges any Israeli Prime Minister must face. Livni and Herzog see eye to eye when it comes to peace negotiations but are worlds apart in their views of the economy and of social responsibility. They make strange bedfellows. To their left are the liberal party, Merets, and the United Arab Bloc. The Orthodox parties are neither left nor right, nor are they centrist. They will join or support whichever government promises most benefits to their constituency.

As indicated, Netanyahu's star has long been waning. At the same time, Israel's penchant for a multiplicity of parties has been shown to be a dismal failure, hence the present interest in forming blocs -- united tickets in which two or more parties join to run while still functioning as separate parties. It is hoped that this process will ultimately lead to a 2-3 party system.

Ministry and Family News

Ministry

My **Introduction to the Pauline Epistles** turned out to be a little book (75 pages). It was a delight to work on this project. I now look forward to seeing it published. I have also completed writing the **commentary on Romans**. All that is now left for me to do is to go over the text one more time, fine-tuning the language. I am going to leave that for work as I travel because it does not require reference material. My **Studies in Matthew** has grown to a (hard-bound) volume of 600 pages – far more than I intended. I have commenced work on a **commentary on Nahum** and am looking at the **next project**, most likely a book on **Church Function and Structure**.

Preparations for the **USA trip** continue with good progress. There are a small number of windows along the northern border States. Interested Churches should write to languageservice4u@gmail.com .

A **hearty thanks** goes to you, our friends and supporters, for your generosity. We would be greatly helped if you would kindly inform us of your **intentions for the coming year**. It is difficult to budget without such information, and impossible to function responsibly without a budget. We were helped toward the end of the year by the erosion of the Israeli currency's value vis-a-vis the Dollar and the Euro, enabling us to regain some of our losses. We are grateful to those who expressed concern when we reported on our circumstances. Selling one of our two vehicles has enabled us to reduce costs and, once we are able to sell our present home and move into the new one, we will be able to reduce expenses still further.

Stop Press

We have just been informed that, as of May 2015, **our major source of support will come to an end**, leaving us with a monthly deficit of over \$3,550. At this stage we have no idea if and how we will be able to bridge this gap, nor which aspects of our labors will have to come to an end. At our age we are unlikely to be able to find gainful employment, although I will consider seeking it. **We are immensely grateful to Patmos International** for their generous support over the years, which we are very happy to acknowledge. May the Lord see to their reward.

Family

Avital has found part-time employment in the local Jewish Community center. His father's recent decease unexpectedly brought Eran to Israel and he is scheduled to soon visit the country again on behalf of his work.

Keith and Shlomit are busy in the church. **Marcus and Tamar** are in the process of transferring to another church.

Two days before we left for Germany we received final licence to sell our **old home** and one day later **the sale** was made – perfect timing from the Lord. Work on the **new home** is drawing to a close.

Bracha and I are presently **in Germany**, where I am lecturing on OT Hermeneutics, Micah, Malachi and Colossians. We will take the opportunity to celebrate our wedding anniversary in a short get-away. God has been good to us beyond imagination and far-far-far beyond our deserts. We thank and praise him.

Katya and Felix in Montreal are coping with the challenges of a new country, a new kind of life and new challenges. Felix is preparing to return to school in view of professional retraining. Katya is working hard on her French in preparation for the required nursing course she must take before being licensed in Canada. Their children, especially little **Emma**, have been ill for a long time now.

Rose continues to excel at school, working very hard at her studies. She has many steep mountains to climb and is sometimes disheartened by the challenge, but continues to display commendable fortitude.

Thank you for your prayers! It is the time of the year to greet one another with the joyful reminder that Messiah was born. He became one of us to bear our sins. He assumed our shame that we might share his glory. May the day soon come when all adore him as he deserves to be adored. May we all have grace to love and serve him.

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You can help by purchasing copies of Baruch's books from Barnes & Noble or from Amazon, by asking for them at your local bookstore and **by posting reviews of these books** on Barnes & Noble or Amazon websites. Positive reviews help sell the books!

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church), P&R. This book presents Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation.

JONAH: A PROPHET ON THE RUN, Shepherd Press. A devotional commentary on the book of Jonah.

MALACHI: A PROPHET IN TIMES OF DISTRESS, Crossbooks. A devotional commentary on the book of Malachi.

All three are available from Barnes & Noble and from Amazon

Baruch's sermons may be heard on [Sermon Audio](#)

To remain abreast of developing circumstances in Israel, visit the [MaozWeb](#) or "follow" Baruch on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and on [Twitter](#) (@BaruchMaoz).

Intermittent bulletins are produced as necessary.



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